

# SOCIAL ACTION



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CHRISTMAS COMES ONCE MORE by Dwight J. Bradley

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## CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION

The distinguishing characteristic of Christian social action is its rootage in the Christian Gospel. There is the well-spring of its inspiration and the source of its imagery. The quality of its spirit, the flavor of its utterance, and the dynamism of its urge are fountained there.

This rootage in the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ's compassion Dr. Bradley authoritatively points out. His special service at this juncture of reconstructing the social process is erection of the bridge by which one crosses easily and naturally from the older vocabulary of theology to the pertinent impingements of the Gospel upon contemporary life. He has provided vehicular access to the social scene from the hills of the eternal Gospel of love divine incarnate.

Pointing to realizable social goals the author authenticates his practical leadership with a humble realization of the proximate nature of all social good. But within the corporate life of mankind he finds the Church inevitably and intuitively at work, as persistent as grace in its redemptive service.

Characterizing the social action which the Church undertakes and encourages is the ineradicable ingredient of the Gospel. Such is the ideology, a true theology, of the present leader of the movement for Christian Social Action in the Congregational and Christian Churches.

—ALFRED W. SWAN.

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# CHRISTMAS COMES ONCE MORE

• by DWIGHT J. BRADLEY

The coming of Jesus Christ into the world, and his subsequent life, his teaching and the circumstances surrounding his death, impressed certain people so greatly that they considered themselves bound to carry the news of it far and wide.

This news became known as the *evangelion* or evangel, and those who felt bound to carry it to the world were known as bearers of the evangel or *evangelists*. They were also called *apostles*, and in recent times they have often been called *missionaries*. They are the ones who help make Christmas come where it has never come before.

In all the great periods of Christian history, the gospel has been preached as the one sure means by which individuals and society can be saved. That is to say, it has been generally believed and taught that the coming of Jesus into the world, the life he lived, the principles he enunciated, the death he died and his resurrection from the dead, introduced a powerful new factor into history; and that if this factor were permitted to function it would not only rescue individuals from personal disaster but would provide civilization with a solid and permanent basis upon which to build its institutions.

Obviously, if this were true, it would be of immense consequence to everyone; and those who could accept it would feel that a tremendously important thing had happened. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that belief in this remarkable *gospel* should have stirred up a ferment in so many hearts and minds, and should have caused so great an excitement to run—at first quietly underneath the surface of pagan society but finally out into the open—until it had inundated the whole decaying Roman civilization. It is not to be wondered at that this *gospel* became ultimately the spiritual current which should irrigate the dry and exhausted earth and awaken the germs of a new culture in the soil of the Dark Ages.



The fact that this *gospel* became so widely acceptable to those who lived in the dying stages of Roman civilization made existence during those stages not only tolerable but wholesomely joyous and creative for those who believed. At the time when classical culture was losing its hold upon the cultured, when popular sports and games were becoming more and more sodden and coarse, when the economic system was falling apart and the political structure was tottering to its fall, at that very moment Christian culture and Christian ways of living were commencing to take form. It is true that during the first formative centuries Christian culture was sneered at by the sophisticated Romans of the well-favored classes, and that Christian ways of living were despised and ridiculed by the degraded Roman masses. But the faith that Christians brought to their daily living was so strong that nothing could break it down. When it became a matter of ordinary experience that a person who dared openly to avow and declare his faith would almost certainly be killed, the word "martyr" (which literally means "a witness") came to mean something poignant, tragic and profound. To be a witness for the gospel meant inevitably that one took the ultimate risk. And so it proved true that, in the words of an ancient Christian saying, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Much seed was sown during these centuries; and the marvelous product of that blood-wetted soil in which this seed took root was not only the Christian Church *per se* but also Christian civilization as an organic whole.

A new kind of civilization grew up, not perfectly nor in its consummate form, but full of capacities for further development, full of promise and hope, full of possibilities to be uncovered as centuries and millenia should come and pass. Its roots were in the ensanguined earth of those lands where the evangelists and the apostles and the missionaries had gone to tell the story of Jesus; of how he came, what he did, what he said, how and why he died, how he rose again, and how by faith in him all persons and all nations and races might be

saved from the otherwise inescapable destruction which injustice, selfishness, heartlessness, pride and egoism made sure.

It is this very same story of Jesus that Christian evangelists have been telling for all these nineteen hundred years. Even when they have perverted the gospel in certain ways, or have watered it down to a sickly thinness, or by their eccentricities and abuses have made the gospel an offense to many who would otherwise have been won by its appeal, still they have never been able to quench the faith of those who listened to the story and believed it in all its amazing fullness.

For the redeeming truth of the gospel has proven always to be total and indivisible. One cannot take the gospel apart and say, "This I will accept and this other I shall reject." The good news found in the story of Jesus is news as a whole and is not some piecemeal account of more or less vaguely related traditions. For this reason there is no salvation, there is no health, in merely analytical digests or studies of the gospel. Such studies and digests have their legitimate use, to be sure. But their use is definitely not in faith-creating preaching. Evangelism is more than a thoughtful elucidation of a passage from the Bible. It is more than a pleasing and liberal presentation of idealistic views and opinions. Evangelism is a kind of irrepressible enthusiasm for something considered to be startlingly true: namely, in the words of the apostle Paul, "that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." And along with it always goes the tacit conviction that Christ came not only once a long time ago, but comes again and again whenever and wherever the gospel story is told and believed.



## THE ROOTS OF SOCIAL ACTION

The phrase *social action* is comparatively new in the Christian lexicon. For this reason it has a more modern sound than the term *evangelism*. But even though the phrase may be of relatively recent coinage, social action *per se* is as old as Christianity. As a matter of fact, it is as old as religion.

In Western civilization, Christian social action has always played a major part. For Christianity more than any other single factor was responsible for the germination and growth and form of Western civilization.

Western civilization is a particular and in some respects unique kind of civilization. It stands out almost by itself in the long progress of history. And its particular uniqueness comes from a conception of the universe, of nature, of man and of God which is set forth first and foremost in the Bible.

The essential basis of life in Western civilization is not Roman and it is not Greek; although the Graeco-Roman influence upon it has been and still is very compelling. The Renaissance brought into Western civilization an important addition of cultural values from the classical Greek tradition. In certain aspects the Renaissance seems to have been the outcome of a peculiarly wistful desire of people, especially amongst the more enlightened, to regain some of the qualities of life which the rediscovery of classical literature and art objects and architectural monuments and philosophy had begun to bring back to light.

Yet even so, Western civilization has remained fundamentally Christian until our own time. That is to say, the commonly accepted assumptions about the nature of things, the reality and character of God, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the duty of man and the final destiny of the human soul—these have remained essentially Christian.

Social action in Western civilization has accordingly in the past been one concrete aspect of Christian living. Christian

men have acted socially in certain ways largely because they believed that these were the ways, in general, in which civilized *Christians* should act. Or, when they have not acted in ways which they regarded as being civilized, their consciences have tended to hurt them and they have either confessed their sins to a duly ordained priest of the Church or have asked God's forgiveness in the privacy of their own souls. Or, further, if they have been so callous and unscrupulous as to act socially without regard for what was generally held to be a civilized Christian way to act, they have not as a rule claimed that their actions were good or Christian; but they have sullenly accepted the common Christian judgment upon their acts only to go their own rebellious or criminal way in outright defiance.

It has only more or less recently become true that responsible and on the whole fairly competent persons within Western civilization have undertaken to deny the validity and authority of basic Christian assumptions in the field of social ethics. It is in our present generation moreover that we have to witness on a large scale for the first time in the history of Western civilization, the results in popular and mass attitudes and action of a direct and unqualified challenge to Christianity as the pattern-forming and underlying factor in domestic, economic, political, inter-racial and international affairs.

In other words, today for probably the first time since the Roman Empire finally crumbled into bits and the new culture arose where the Roman culture had gone down, millions of people in what once were parts of a great Christendom are taught from their infancy onward that social action should not be taken on Christian terms at all, but should be taken on terms laid down by the new totalitarian paganisms.

To many this seems most portentous as an outright defiance of democracy. But it is even more than a defiance of democracy, for democracy itself as it has grown up in Western civilization, is directly a product of Jewish-Christian faith and ethics. Hitler and Mussolini have been quite right, therefore, in contending that their warfare was not merely with democra-



cies as such, but with the principles back of democracy. And they were perfectly correct also in contending that in the effort to undermine the democratic principles they must drive out the Jews and the influence of Judaism. For the influence of Judaism, next to that of Christianity, is the most powerful force making for the kind of democracy which has commenced to emerge within Western civilization, and to emerge also in those other nations of Asia and Africa and the Islands of the sea where the Biblical-Christian *evangel* has taken hold to some extent as the result of missionary efforts.

The Christian gospel, therefore, being derived in so great part from Jewish sources, and yet being significantly different from Judaism because of the factor introduced by Jesus, has been the chief stimulating and fecundating force in social affairs throughout the whole history of Western civilization until fairly recent times.

It may be suggested, accordingly, that the kind of social action which led barbarous European peoples through one phase after another of civilizing process until at length an embryonic type of democracy appeared, has been the result of Jewish-Christian influences far more than the result of influences deriving from Athens and Rome. And it may be furthermore suggested that the contemporary turning away from democracy, as well as the present insistence upon the eradication of the Jews and their influence from Western civilization, is the logical result of a general abandonment of true Christian evangelism in modern times, followed by a mass rejection of the gospel and the substitution of essentially pagan conceptions of existence.

Seen in the large, Western civilization appears at this present moment to be vacillating between two choices: the one leading to a further extension of neo-paganism, the other leading to a true revival of Christianity. The one choice goes back to the Greeks and Romans and barbarians. The other goes back to the Bible and to the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

The bearing all this has upon social action should be fairly plain. For the kind of social action that is going to prevail and become customary in the immediate future will be either the kind that develops naturally and simply from the neo-pagan ideologies of the totalitarian states, or else the kind that grows normally out of Biblical-Christian theology, anthropology, psychology, cosmology and social ethics. Either Christmas shall come once more—or the dark night of frustration will once again cover the earth.

This does not mean that the choice of the Christian worldview would or could eliminate the influence of Graeco-Roman tradition, any more than it means the exclusion of influences that emanate from India or from any other ancient cultural and religious center. But it means very definitely that the influence of Greek and Roman tradition, like that of Buddhism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism or the best of Hindu mysticism, should be put and kept in the secondary position. It may be said quite rightly that all these traditions and their influences must be baptized as it were into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, before they can properly be accepted into the fellowship of the Biblical-Christian faith.

Social action therefore, provided that a Christian choice be made, would necessarily be a kind of social action determined by belief in and loyalty to the gospel in its rich fullness. The life, the teaching, the death and resurrection, and the significance of Jesus of Nazareth as the redeemer and savior of mankind, would provide the basis and form the pattern of all action in the field of social and public affairs.

The net effect upon social action of a Christian choice, as over against the various counter-choices offered by modern paganism, would be comparatively easy to predict, provided that a fairly accurate knowledge were available of the circumstances and conditions under which such action would have to be carried out. That is to say, given a certain setting of climate and geography with certain natural resources to draw upon



and a certain population to feed and house and clothe, together with a certain indigenous historical background of folkways and traditions to build upon—Christian social action would be almost bound to follow a course which in its general trend could be foreseen.

Suppose, for example, that the Christian choice were to be made by a primitive community or nation located in a temperate climate where natural conditions were fairly pleasant and favorable. There would be sufficient food available for the comparatively limited population. There would exist a background of very simple and unsophisticated folkways. So that the effort of sincere Christian social action would be to preserve intact most of the traditional folkways; but at the same time, (1) to develop habits and practices of family life involving deeper and more lasting attachments between man and wife and more sympathetic and enlightened attitudes in the parents towards their children; (2) to improve the economic status of the people as a whole by the introduction of better methods of production and by the protection of the people from exploitation or expropriation by any individuals or groups; (3) to secure a higher level of personal and social health; (4) to see to it that the changes in ways of living did not bring about any loss of social security or well-being to any part of the community or nation; (5) and to guarantee that whatever political authority seemed necessary should be exerted in as just and equitable and liberal a manner as possible.

Such a primeval condition, although now exceptional or non-existent, was found in certain parts of the so-called uncivilized world by missionaries in the past. But as a matter of record, the purely Christian efforts of social action even where the earlier missionaries went, were invariably counteracted and sometimes completely cancelled out, by the unchristian practices of certain traders and trading companies supported either tacitly or openly by their home governments—and by other irresponsible and shabby representatives of Western civilization.

Indeed, the missionaries themselves were not at all times

innocent of the same offenses. Very often their social practices did not derive in any noticeable way from a plainly Christian choice based on complete acceptance of the gospel in its fullness. It seemed at times to the "natives" that these Christians who preached to them about a wonderful savior named Jesus, could not believe very much in their savior nor in the applicability of their saving gospel to everyday affairs or to matters connected with the imperial aims and commercial ambitions of their fellow-countrymen from Europe and America.

This being so however, the social action to which the far greater share of missionaries gave and now give themselves was and is distinctly Christian in its motivation, even though the forms it has taken bear sometimes only a faint resemblance to the authentic gospel pattern. And in certain more striking cases the social action of missionary leadership has come very near indeed to expressing the purest understanding and acceptance of the whole gospel in every detail and item of its meaning in practical affairs. It hardly seems fair to name any of such outstanding Christian missionaries without being able also to name them all and fill the entire roster; but if only to illustrate the truth it may not appear wholly amiss to remind ourselves of the work at this very time being carried on in all parts of the world by such American Board missionaries as Laubach, Shepherd, Hubbard, Ruth Cowles, Manshardt, Phillips and Moran. These represent only a fraction of all that is being done by missionaries of only one denomination. They stand in an unbroken organic succession that goes back more than one hundred years.

The problem they face is the same that all Christian evangelists have had always to confront: namely, how to make sure that social action is based upon a completely Christian choice and not upon a choice that is only partly Christian. It is a problem lying more in the field of root evangelism than in the area of social action itself. Faulty or only half-way Christian evangelism leads to belief in a gospel lacking completeness. From it something important has been left out. The



believer who accepts such a truncated or mutilated gospel is not a full believer even though he may be deluded into thinking that he is. He believes as much of the gospel as he knows about but there are parts of it about which he does not know. It is not entirely his fault, therefore, if his belief is faulty and his social action misguided. But the effect of his faulty belief and of his misguided social action is bound very soon to become painfully plain.

What then is the gospel in its wholeness? Is it not the story of Jesus, recounted in the New Testament—the story of the One who came into the world, lived in the world for thirty-three years, taught certain principles, went about doing good, showed himself to be of a certain character in which deep wisdom and limitless compassion were the most significant ingredients, gave himself up to die without resistance, was reported by his disciples and friends to have risen from the dead and to have ascended into heaven, and was given continuance of life and power and influence in the world both by his own presence through the Holy Spirit and by the company of those who were faithful to him from generation to generation in the Church? Is not this in all essentials the true gospel?

Those therefore who are able to accept this gospel as true and to let it have its way with them, seem to be those who are most able to make a truly Christian choice and to proceed forthwith into straightforward Christian social action.

Those on the other hand who are unable to accept this gospel as true and who are thereby prevented from letting it have its way with them, are also kept from making a clearly and specifically Christian choice, although they may make choices which are tinged or even strongly marked by Christian characteristics. And in so far as they are kept by lack of faith from making an unambiguously Christian choice, they are kept also from proceeding into definitely Christian social action; although here again they may engage in valuable kinds of social action which are in many respects significantly Christian.

The roots of Christian social action of the specific kind go

down deep into the field of Christian faith. But the roots are planted by evangelism—that is to say, by telling the gospel story.

So, before Christian social action is possible there must be the definitely Christian choice. And before the Christian choice can be made there must be the Christian faith. And before the faith can be spread there must be a preaching of that whole gospel which is so persuasive and so evangelical that those who hear it are drawn powerfully to heed and accept it and to let it have its way with them.

In the simplest but most profound sense, moreover, Christian social action is bound always to be *radical action*; because Christian social action has deep roots. Its roots go down as deeply as faith goes down into the knowledge and love of God in Jesus Christ. This is to go down very deeply indeed. It makes merely secular social action seem somewhat futile because of its superficiality. It makes the ordinarily so-called “radicalism” of revolutionary pressure groups seem perfectly rootless—and so it is. For the seeming “radicalism” of revolutionary pressure groups is based at deepest upon the philosophy and ethics of Karl Marx, undoubtedly the most profoundly radical secular critic of modern civilization. But the Marxist rootage is shallow compared with that of the Christian who believes in Jesus Christ as God’s incarnate revelation of Himself. It is shallow compared with the rootage of a faithful Jew in his grand ancestral belief in the God of history.

Christian social action can never therefore properly be equated with secular social action of any sort—whether it be liberal or radical or on the other hand reactionary or conservative. Christian social action is *per se* radical, but in a special sense. It is liberal also, but again in a special and less important sense. It may even be considered in certain respects reactionary also; and it must always be profoundly conservative in regard to its eternal meanings.

It may be seen thus that the usual designations do not apply



literally to Christian social action. They do not apply at all except as they are re-defined to bring out special meanings. The term to use in speaking of Christian social action is simply the term *Christian*. This term covers all the points which might be covered, but only in a vague and to some extent misleading way, by the customary *cliche* whereby action is specified as being either reactionary, conservative, liberal or radical. Christian social action is all of these things, and yet in a worldly sense it is not one of them. And the reason for this is that Christian social action stems from faith in Jesus Christ and roots down in the soil of the Christian gospel. It has more and different dimensions than any that are possible for secular social action. It is always a mistake, therefore, to attempt to define Christian social action in the current secular terms.

It would be entirely proper to say that from the secular and temporal standpoint Christian social action is *sui generis*.

It does not originate in humanitarian sympathies, although it poignantly feels and shares them. It does not spring from a love of justice, although it loves justice with an inflexible and determined allegiance. It does not derive from a desire to help build a better world, although it looks about to see and grasp every opportunity to help in the building of a better world. It does not even arise from a devotion to the ideal of the kingdom of God, although it cherishes that ideal and is utterly devoted to it.

From what then does it spring? It springs and arises from a simple belief in the gospel story and from the assurance that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It arises and springs from a devout acceptance of the story of Jesus in its wholeness and fullness, and from a willingness to let that story have its way with one's entire life.

Obviously therefore, the roots of Christian social action are those of belief and faith as they reach down deeply into the soil of evangelical Christianity.

## THE BOND OF SOCIAL ACTION

Social action is bound to be social in a double sense. It not only is directed towards affecting social relationships but it is carried on jointly and mutually by those who live and work in a social relationship.

It would be quite impossible for an individual to achieve significant results by himself. There is no such thing, strictly speaking, as individual action. Every individual when he acts does so willy nilly with the help of other individuals. It may be that a general receives credit for winning a battle; but this is only because he has been able to direct the fighting of other men. The manager of a business may be rewarded for building up a great establishment; but his success has depended in large measure upon the willingness of scores or thousands of other men to work competently with him.

All social action is carried on socially. The outstanding individual is, when all things are considered, only one active agent among many. His contribution may be greater than that of any other, but even so without the contributions of others his contribution would be largely wasted.

Christian social action as it originates in faith and roots down in the soil of evangelical Christianity, is the action of a particular kind of fellowship. It is the action of a fellowship based on a common faith and sharing the same rootage. It is action by a fellowship of those who believe the gospel and whose lives reach down deeply into the redemptive love of God.

Before his crucifixion Jesus gave his disciples a token of their fellowship with him and with each other; and he charged them to pass it on to their descendents and successors, so that as long as men should live on earth those who believed in the gospel and had faith in him might be held together in a bond stronger even than death.

This is the Holy Communion of the Lord's Supper, sometimes called the Eucharist. It is, as a matter of fact and experience, far more than a token. It is a visible bond binding the



souls of men. There is a depth and range of mystery lying within the chalice and impenetrating the broken bread, which no description has ever been able fully to define. It is felt, however, by those who come to the Communion with humble and penitent and devout hearts.

So far as social action is concerned, the one enduring historical and physical tie that binds together those who would make the Christian choice and go forthwith into Christian action, is the mutually shared *body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ*, which is made manifest in the broken bread and the poured out wine of which the faithful communicant partakes with thanksgiving.

To those not accustomed to thinking in these terms such a broad and categorical statement as the above may seem hardly convincing. And for that reason it is all the more important, having made the statement, to seek to support it by as much reasonable argument as possible.

Why, then, is the Holy Communion to be regarded as the chief and most enduring historical and physical tie by which Christians are bound together for true Christian social action?

The first and perhaps the least cogent reason is that some such tie seems necessary, and the Holy Communion has been the basis of Christian fellowship from the time of Jesus' last supper in the upper room until this very day. There is an unbroken continuity in this fellowship which, excepting that of the Jewish synagogue, has lasted longer and has affected men's lives more deeply than any other continuous bond of fellowship in Western civilization.

As a matter of mere tradition, therefore, or of mere sentiment, or even of mere historical relevancy, the Holy Communion is of all Christian ties the most meaningful and the most binding. Only those of iconoclastic temper are unaffected by it. Even to many who are unable to believe the whole story of Jesus, the Eucharist sends forth a profound spiritual appeal. Although they do not or can not accept the gospel in its en-

tirety they seem hardly able to resist the attraction of this ancient bond of fellowship. They will oftentimes explain that while they repudiate what they call its "theology" they gladly receive the mystical sense of union and harmony with God and man that it gives them.

But these considerations, taken alone, are trivial compared with the true and profound reason for cherishing and maintaining this great tie, a reason which for the devout and faithful Christian amounts to an imperative. He hears the Lord Christ say to him personally and say to all his fellow Christians, "*This do in remembrance of me!*"

Social action, therefore, in so far as it is clearly and specifically Christian, finds its chief outward bond of fellowship in the constantly repeated act of remembrance and reconsecration at the Lord's table. For this reason Christian social action is almost necessarily *sacramental*, since it is based on the fellowship of a mighty sacrament. *To become sacramental an act must be derived from profound belief and must be carried on in a fellowship of those who not only share the same belief but swear, as it were, by this same belief to act in a certain way.*

So it is with Christian social action. It must be conducted socially in a fellowship. It must spring from a belief in the story of Jesus and from faith in him as redeemer. It must root down in the soil of evangelical Christianity. And it must commence with an act of allegiance to Jesus Christ in a fellowship of devotion to him and to his redemptive work in the world. Then and only then is Christian social action possible, except in the most limited and qualified way.

There are some, however, who seem or claim to have gone beyond the need of physical and visible sacramental tokens and who for this reason do not find themselves comfortable or at least greatly uplifted when the actual bread and wine are used in the Holy Communion. In so far as their claim is authentic and in so far as they are indeed more profoundly stirred and more closely knit together in a sacramental fellowship that

dispenses with the use of outward and objective symbols, such persons without the physical tokens of bread and wine should surely be encouraged to enter the same circle of Christian fellowship that others enter by aid of these.

Among such persons and groups the Friends or Quakers stand out most definitely; for while they certainly belong within the very inner circle of true Christian fellowship they do not employ any of the generally accepted external symbols or outward tokens. It would be presumptuous, simply because they do not use the tokens, to seek to exclude them from the circle. But on the other hand it would be no less presumptuous for them or for any other groups of similar disposition to adjudge others who love the sacramental symbols to be in any degree less spiritual than they.

As a matter of fact, the sacrament *per se* is invisible and intangible, for spiritual relationships must by their own nature necessarily always be so. Yet the visible and tangible token may become, as it were, a physical aspect of the profound spiritual relationship. In such manner the bread and wine of the Holy Communion are held by most faithful and devout Christians to stand for and to nourish the mystical fellowship of those who by faith in Jesus Christ seek to do God's will in the world.

The kind of social action which issues from such a sense of sacramental fellowship as this is most truly Christian; and it becomes itself invested with an authentic sacramental quality. The social action of such men as Kagawa and Schweitzer (to cite two of the most well known contemporary Christian examples of this very thing), is definitely sacramental. So also is that of Mahatma Gandhi, although he acknowledges a sacramental bond not with Christians but with his fellow Indians within the Hindu circle, and so can hardly be regarded as partaking of the specifically Christian sacramental fellowship.

These men, let it be noted, do not pretend to work alone. They avow themselves to be members of a spiritual community, and they exert themselves not as solitary individuals but as



representatives of a fellowship that roots deep down in the eternal. Therefore in effect as well as in origin, their social action has a character for which the term sacramental seems to be by far the most definitive.

The specific form in which such social action presents itself is quite definitely determined by its inward character. There are certain kinds of social action which must be held impossible for a Christian in so far as he seeks always to act entirely within the sacramental fellowship or directly in its behalf. If he at any time and under any circumstances seems to find it necessary to cease acting purely as a member of the fellowship, the very fact that he is a member of the fellowship makes him poignantly conscious of his failure and of his sin in this respect.

As a matter of plain fact, however, it seems impossible for any Christian, no matter how faithful and devout he may be, always to act purely as a member of the sacramental Christian fellowship. This is one of the tragic things a Christian discovers as he makes his way through the world. But if he cannot maintain his action at all times at a level of sacramental consistency, he may at least keep himself aware of the occasions when he acts on the lower levels of compromise. By so doing he remains humble and penitent and never is tempted to congratulate himself upon his good deeds. He knows full well that his deeds are probably far from good according to the standard set by his faith and by his devotion to the sacramental body.

For this reason, while he may and perhaps must at times enter into compromises far below the standard which he so earnestly desires to maintain, he is prevented by his clear realization of what he is doing from becoming inwardly disloyal or outwardly pharisaical. Many a person has passed through fiery torment because of this; but such a torment is hardly so frightful or so paralyzing as is that of the person who, naively unconscious of his compromising sin when it is consummated, awakens sooner or later to the consequences of an act which once seemed justifiable but now shows itself in all its wretched

wrongness. It is probably better to do wrong knowing it to be wrong than to do wrong unwittingly thinking one is doing right, only to discover later on that what one thought was right was actually evil.

The problem of compromise is, however, a difficult one. It is hard for anyone to know with perfect certainty when, by accommodating himself to apparently inescapable conditions, he is acting against the basic principles of his faith and against the fundamental demands of the fellowship. Nevertheless there come times when the refusal to compromise seems even to the wisest and most devoted Christians to be more sinful than coming to terms with an actual situation.

We will have occasion to deal with this matter at greater length later on; but here and now it may be well to suggest three possible guides or rules for compromise which may help somewhat in meeting if not in solving the problem.

In the first place, the prior claim upon the Christian is that of loyalty to the sacramental fellowship. Disloyalty must necessarily disqualify him for membership. No matter what he may do and no matter what terms he may make with what seems to be an inescapably compromising situation, if his compromise involves him in inward disloyalty or in an outward act which shows him unmistakably to be disloyal, then he has lost everything. Thus it was, of course, with Judas Iscariot.

In the second place, if and in so far as it is possible to accommodate oneself to a condition or situation without falling out of loyalty to the fellowship, then the problem is one of expediency only. That is to say, if one can compromise and still remain inwardly and outwardly loyal, he must then use his best judgment and must consult with other members of the fellowship to decide how far such a compromise should be entered into and to what end the compromise is likely to lead.

If the compromise promises to require such a watering down of conviction as to entail loss of moral independence, then it must be refused or abandoned, even though it may not in itself seem necessarily to involve a spirit or act of outright disloyalty.

But if the compromise promises to demand very little real loss of moral independence and promises also to lead to a result somewhat better than a failure to compromise would lead to, then there is no compelling reason for refusing or abandoning the compromise.

In the third place, it must always be remembered that the compromise is to be entered into, not in order to achieve ideal Christian ends nor in order to enhance the prestige or to strengthen the bonds of the sacramental fellowship, but merely and only for the purpose of helping practically in the struggle outside the fellowship for some greater measure of freedom and justice and happiness amongst men.

Let us take, for example, the case of an especially conscientious Christian fruit rancher in a Western state, who is presented with the following set of choices: He can reduce the already insufficient wages of those who pick his crop, and thus make enough money to pay the interest on his loan at the bank. Or he can maintain wages and risk losing his heavily mortgaged ranch. Or, although he is an ardent Prohibitionist, he can sell the grape culls from his vineyard to be made into wine. By so doing he could possibly make enough extra money to maintain wages and pay his interest at the same time.

Obviously, this man must compromise at some point. *The question is not whether to compromise but at what point to compromise.* Above all things he desires to be a loyal Christian. What then shall he do? Shall he go against his strong Christian convictions as a Prohibitionist and sell his grape culls? Shall he sacrifice his ranch in order to pay his workers better wages? Shall he decrease the pittance he is paying his workers in order to save his ranch from the bank, to preserve the integrity of his conscience about selling his grapes for wine, and to be in a position to employ workers another season?

And now suddenly a new factor enters the situation. The workers join a newly organized union. The Christian rancher is confronted by a choice between quietly accepting the union



and bargaining with it, and uniting with his fellow ranchers to fight it. If he accepts and bargains with the union he will gain the enmity of his fellow ranchers and the bank. If he fights the union he will incur the anger of the workers. How then can he remain loyal to the pure Christian faith and fellowship under any circumstances?

It is a real and tragic dilemma. The Christian rancher must be very wise and very conscientious indeed if he is to effect a compromise in such a situation that neither betrays his Christian principles nor creates greater unhappiness, rancor and injustice amongst men.

One of the mistakes made by those who with high Christian idealism enter into the struggles of the world is that they forget what are the real objects of the world's struggles. The world does not struggle for ideal Christian objects, but only for certain more or less realizable temporal ends. Liberty and justice as the world sees them are not ideal Christian objects. They can be fought for and won by fighting as ideal Christian objects can not. But once they have been won they do not guarantee those who have gained them any greater amount of Christian virtue. Liberty and justice are elementary ingredients of a decent civilization. They are not the ingredients which change a merely secular social order into the kingdom of God.

The simple ingredients of the kingdom of God (forgiveness, humility, unselfishness, patience, compassion, creative love) are found within the sacramental fellowship of those who actively believe the story of Jesus. And these ingredients most assuredly must be introduced into each and every situation where a member of the fellowship is engaged. But the necessity for compromise in certain situations inevitably prevents the ingredients of God's kingdom from being purely effective and forbids one from claiming that despite the compromise he is working or struggling purely to build God's kingdom.

As a matter of fact one is not struggling to build God's kingdom (which cannot be built, but which grows) but rather to help achieve a somewhat better civilization. Even so, how-

ever, one does not forget God's kingdom. He remembers it keenly; and by remembering it he keeps himself from being deluded into thinking that while he is engaging in secular or compromising social action he is at the same time engaged in creating God's kingdom on earth.

This is a fairly delicate point and one about which considerable controversy has been raging in recent years. The two extremes of viewpoint in this controversy are represented by those who on the one hand claim that to work for human justice and the betterment of social conditions is *per se* to build God's kingdom on earth, no matter by whom or under what auspices it is done; and by those who on the other hand insist that no amount of effort to achieve social justice or to better the conditions of living for humanity can be regarded as having any bearing whatsoever upon the coming of God's kingdom. The first position is the one usually taken by Christian idealists, while the second has been most strikingly set forth by Karl Barth and the so-called "crisis theologians."

It would seem wise to avoid each of these extremes and try to find a more temperate and reasonable position. Put in one way, the kingdom of God as it now appears on earth is the fellowship of those who seek through faith in Christ to know and to do God's will. The growth of God's kingdom progresses, therefore, with the increase of those who seek through Christ to know and to do God's will. And God's kingdom shall have fully and finally come on earth when all the people on earth, without a single exception, shall have come fully and perfectly to know and to do God's will.

When, however, men have achieved justice and freedom and have bettered their condition never so greatly, it will not necessarily be true that God's kingdom shall have come. As a matter of fact, men who are merely free, who merely have achieved justice for themselves or others, and who merely have bettered their condition, may be entirely ignorant of God's will and might be quite unwilling to do it even if they should clearly know what it is. Men who are treated justly may in their turn

treat other men unjustly. Men whose condition in life is abundantly comfortable and easy may be and more often than not are selfish, self-indulgent and egoistical, quite forgetful of the wretchedness and unhappiness of others.

On the other hand however, it is utterly impossible for one to remain spiritually in the sacramental fellowship if he refuses to strive for justice and the betterment of the conditions under which human beings live. One should not try to continue in the fellowship unless he seeks to do justly, to help other men to freedom, and to put himself at the disposal of those who need his collaboration or aid.

*Thus it appears that although the kingdom of God does not come by mere human striving for a better civilization, it is impossible for anyone to enter or remain within the fellowship of God's kingdom if he refuses to enter the strife.*

In other words, in order to demonstrate the sincerity of one's love of God's kingdom one must work for the liberation of men, for the time when all men shall be treated justly, and for the lifting of the standard of temporal existence for every human soul. He who refrains from doing these things forfeits the moral right to claim fellowship as a Christian with Christians. By his callousness and indifference to the plight of other men he renders himself incapable of associating in a sacramental society with those who are sensitive and aware.

The point to keep clearly in mind is that the evangelical Christian in the sacramental fellowship is under a moral obligation to act in the world as a *representative* of God's kingdom, even though it may seem necessary at certain times to compromise and accommodate himself to conditions. However, he should never be so pretentious as to believe that he has power or authority or even the moral consistency in his own nature to establish God's kingdom on earth, since this is God's own responsibility which he has not delegated to any human being nor to any human institution, although Christ has called upon us all to live and labor in its behalf.

It is not therefore the actual building of God's kingdom on



earth that the Christian fellowship is commissioned to carry on through social action; but rather, representing God's kingdom, to tell the story of Jesus so that many may hear and heed and accept it and let it have its way with them—and in addition to this as an inevitable consequence of faith and devotion, to engage in constructive social action so that the world may be a better place in which to live, with more justice, more freedom and more of the things by which a healthful and happy existence on earth may be sustained by the great masses of mankind.

The enduring historical and physical tie that binds Christians in a fellowship worthy and able to help in this task is the great sacrament of love and remembrance made visible in the Eucharist or Holy Communion. And whether or not the symbols or tokens are used, the inward fact must be known, realized and accepted. For Christian social action bereft of this loses its chief meaning and fails in its ultimate aim.



### Christmas is Coming

*Give your friends subscriptions to SOCIAL ACTION this year. They will be delighted with your thoughtfulness and you will feel that you have introduced them to one of your helpful friends. Ten times during 1940 SOCIAL ACTION will serve to remind them that your Christmas wishes were meant to last throughout the year.*

## THE STORY OF JESUS AND THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

If Christian evangelism be the telling and the re-telling of the story of how Jesus came into the world and what happened because he came, and if Christian social action be the work of those who believe this story and let it have its way with them in their lives, then social action becomes one way in which the fellowship of believers in Jesus show their loyal faith in him.

But if, on the other hand, all practical social action is likely to involve compromises more or less grave with situations and conditions in the world, then Christian social action is not the way in which belief in Jesus can most purely show itself to the world.

What then is the purest and least compromising way in which belief and loyalty can be expressed? Is it not through the plain and simple testimony that those can give who simply and sincerely believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

So it would seem. And if so, then surely the first obligation that falls upon each Christian is to witness to his faith—and to do so without counting the cost to himself and without entering any serious compromises with the world. This is pure evangelism. It is pure good news telling. It is the pure missionary task. Yes, and under certain conditions it is pure martyrdom.

But so involved is the Christian almost willy nilly in the situations and conditions of the world, that he can hardly extricate himself to bear the pure gospel message to the world. That is to say, while he is under a primary spiritual obligation to witness to his faith without entering into any compromises, practically speaking he can do so only with utmost difficulty if at all. The very fact that he is living in the world, eating its food, dwelling in its houses, reaping the benefits of its institutions, depending for physical protection upon its governments and its police, and carrying on a more or less civilized existence by means of its languages, laws, traditions, arts, folkways and

technics—this very fact makes it nearly impossible for the most devout Christian to live without contamination the pure life of faith or even always to speak the pure word of gospel truth.

The early Christians seem to have understood this, although they strove much harder than most of their successors and descendents to rise above the compromising necessities of life in the world.

They realized that they were caught, as it were, in a situation from which they could never be rescued until either they should individually die and be taken to heaven, or the world itself should be destroyed and be replaced by a new world in which faithful Christians could live normally and happily without having to accommodate themselves to conditions which they loathed and abhorred.

These early Christians were indeed trapped in a situation. When we read in the apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians (4:22), "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household," we can see as it were the slight opening of a door and through the chink a few slaves serving their bestial imperial master. Even a casual knowledge of the conditions prevalent at that time will be sufficient to suggest the duties into which these servants were pressed; as for example the serving of tables during one of the great banquets and the attendance upon the guests as they engaged in every sort of sexual perversion. And yet, these whose daily tasks must have been so utterly detestable to them are called "saints."

Saints they were. For they believed the gospel and loved their Lord Jesus even though they waited upon the vile Caesar and went through the motions of servile obedience to him.

It has remained for Christians of a later and perhaps less grossly evil day to forget or to overlook the situation in which they too are caught. Only in relatively recent times have those who avowed their belief in the gospel failed to realize that even in a democratic world the faithful Christian finds himself still "a stranger and a pilgrim." In other words, only the very superficial kind of liberal idealism that grew



up and flourished for awhile in Western civilization and especially in the United States, could have been blind to the compromises and accommodations still required of Christians who should make shift to carry on a somewhat ambiguous existence in society. As a matter of record, so-called liberal Christians seemed for a time to be less aware of these compromises than were certain sensitive souls who made no avowal of Christian belief. There was for example Henry David Thoreau whose book "Walden" stands as the classic American expression of revulsion against the squalid terms upon which a man, even in the American democracy, had to live if he yielded to the practical necessities of life in so compromising a world. And it was left to Thorsten Veblen, the iconoclast of the sensitized conscience, to lay bare in his mordant writings the pretensions, the shams, the pharisaical self-delusions of those whose idealism served only to make them more smug in their certainty of social and spiritual salvation.

Currently, however, the Christian consciousness seems to be reawakening to this circumstance. And as the reawakening becomes more and more clear there is a tendency to put aside the bland belief that the world has become at last so good a place in which to live that Christians need no longer have any serious compunction about coming to fairly agreeable terms with it.

It is becoming increasingly plain to Christians who live today that the conditions are different from those of former times only in particular detail or in degree and not at all in kind. The gospel still requires those of the sacramental fellowship of Christ either to reject the world entirely and withdraw from it into some manner of ascetical or monastic existence, or to accept martyrdom, or else to arrange a *modus vivendi* by which to carry on existence as those who in the well known phrase are "in the world yet not of it."

It is hardly possible, therefore, to be an effectual evangelist or an effective worker in the field of social action without being willing at certain points to give hostages to the enemy.

To tell the story of Jesus or to strive practically in behalf of God's kingdom to make the world a better place in which to live, means being able to "get along somehow" with conditions as they generally are. This is true wherever missionaries go and wherever men and women of the Christian fellowship set themselves to work in the areas of social need. There is always a certain amount of tribute to be paid to Caesar. There is always the mammon of unrighteousness to be placated.

But those who know the gospel realize that Jesus himself understood all this and foresaw such situations. His rather tart and wholly ironical injunction to those who wished to be his disciples that they be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," is ample proof of his thorough comprehension.

What is more, Jesus passed through the self-same thing himself. He made many compromises with those who were hostile to him and to his message, pending the time when he was ready to make a clean cut issue with them. It was not until he was fully prepared to force the matter that he ceased temporizing and compromising with Herod and the Pharisees and laid down his unqualified challenge to everything that they were and stood for.

So, in telling the story of Jesus and in trying at the same time to improve the life of the world, the evangelical Christian in the sacramental bond begins by doing the very thing that Jesus himself did and taught his disciples to do. He comes to such terms with the world as are necessary in order to tell the story and to start on the task of world improvement. But in doing this he does not preclude the possibility, nor even render less probable the likelihood that *at a certain time of his own choosing* he will withdraw from the compromise and speak out or act in such a way as to make entirely clear his moral independence.

For as he goes on he comes at length to a place where he must either compromise too greatly and therefore be untrue to his belief and his bond, or else refuse to compromise any further and suffer whatever consequences there may be.

As we have already seen it is not usually easy to know precisely when that place has been reached, and it requires not only a sensitive conscience but also a large amount of good judgment and common sense. As a matter of fact, there seems to be no blanket rule to lay down to cover all specific cases. The error of some Christians, notably certain politically-minded pacifists and unqualified enemies of capitalism and the profit system is—if one may venture to say so—that they absolutize the practical positions they take on war or economic relations, despite the fact that to do so involves them in moral contradictions more confusing than ever.

A wiser and more mature position for evangelical Christians to take within the sacramental bond, would appear to be that there are degrees of justifiable compromise for those who seek to improve the world by direct action, which must be determined by intelligent analysis of each situation and by a temperate judgment as to the conditions.

When, for example, the apostle Paul decided to make his appeal to Caesar he apparently came to this decision by trying to think out, so to speak, the probabilities and possibilities of becoming free once more to travel about the empire and preach the gospel. As it turned out he made what may have seemed a mistake, for his appeal failed. But even so the apostle was able to make excellent use of his captivity and was not at all inclined to blame himself or to brood over the failure. To Paul and to mature Christians of every age, Caesar represents the more or less arbitrary political power and order of the world, with which the pure faith of Christianity has to come to terms. It is not evil in itself but it is made necessary by evil. The evangelical Christian in the sacramental fellowship desires sincerely to support the political power in so far as its administration is orderly and just. But even so, no truly evangelical Christian with a clear sense of fellowship within the bond, has ever regarded the political power as being more than a temporal and a worldly thing that must at best be compromised with and at worst be ignored or defied.



The same thing is true of civilized institutions as a whole. It is true of economic systems, systems of law, domestic regulations and all else. These are necessary and may conceivably become instruments of God's kingdom if and when the human beings who use them and carry them on have become generally loyal to the will of God. When this shall have come to pass the world will have become good in fact as well as in ideal. Then the Christian will have to enter no disturbing compromises nor accommodate himself to any sub-Christian situations. But until the time comes when such is actually the case, both the evangelistic work of preaching and the work of social action will require varying degrees and grades of compromise with the political, economic and other institutional aspects of civilizational existence.

Even within the sacramental fellowship itself a certain amount of compromise is exacted. For the fellowship functions through an institution, the visible Church, and there is no institution which at times more flagrantly denies its own true nature or more discouragingly falls below its proper level.

So the evangelical Christian in the sacramental bond must even compromise with the Church institution if he wishes to tell the story of Jesus with the support of money and means which the Church institution can provide. And if he wishes to engage in social action under the auspices of the Church institution he must compromise still more.

If, however, the evangelical Christian in the sacramental fellowship desires to preach the gospel without compromising with the Church institution, or to engage in social action independently, he will find himself in an even more difficult position. For despite its gross failure to live up to its own level, the Church institution offers the evangelist and the worker in the social field a kind of support and encouragement which he can hardly find on the same scale anywhere else. There are of course exceptions to this general rule. Sometimes the Church institution becomes so evil, is so perverse, gives itself up to such treachery and deceit, that the true

Christian of evangelical faith and sacramental devotion must actually flee away from it or perhaps even preach against it and turn the forces of social action towards its immediate but temporary destruction.

This has happened on occasion but with relative infrequency. It seems not likely to happen again in our time. For as a whole the Church institution stands today before the world and lives within itself on what is perhaps the highest level of spiritual and moral integrity that it has reached at any time thus far during its long history. And even on the most critical terms it must be remembered that Christian evangelism and Christian social action always have to make use of the things of this world including the Church institution, even though they have to be on constant guard lest the forces of the world make use of them. Evangelical and sacramental Christianity maintains always a tension between itself and the world; and it is upon the genius as well as the devoutness of able and prophetic churchmen that the responsibility falls for keeping the tension between the Christian fellowship and the secular world keyed to the highest pitch that the circumstances permit.

It is never easy to tell the story of Jesus even under the auspices of a liberal and democratic civilization. Aggressive Christian social action has never been and at no time probably will be very greatly encouraged by the economic, political and social forces which exercise the largest measure of control over the life of the world. To recognize this fact is the practical duty of all Christians. For when a time comes when the powers that control the world-order become significantly favorable to Christian social action, then is the time when Christians should be the most wary. It was never more true than it is today that of Greeks bearing gifts a wise man should beware.

All care should be exercised lest by too naive an idealism the evangelist or worker in social action be led to discount the necessity of coming to terms with the world at certain

points. Failure clearly and frankly to recognize this necessity leads to confusion and results in the undoing of much which has been accomplished by abler and wiser men in the past.

On the other hand equal care should be taken lest by an excess of accommodation the preacher and social prophet let themselves be lured into an easy-going attitude of compromise in all situations and thus become responsible for great losses of ground by sheer default. Devotion, faith, prayer, and an intelligent understanding of the world with its ways both evil and good, together with an honest willingness to follow such an understanding with sound moral judgments and decisions, are all necessary if proper care is to be taken.

## SOCIAL ACTION AND THE WAYS OF THE WORLD

In order to enter the field of social action constructively and with a certain amount of intelligence it is necessary to approach it, as it were, through the various institutional gates which civilization has set up. These are, speaking generally, the domestic, the economic, the political and the international. There is also the specifically cultural gateway as well as that of inter-racial relations.

Social action deals almost invariably with one or more of the social areas entered through these institutional gateways. So, while much space would be required to describe the whole ground to be covered and to point out the means and methods of social action which have been or can be used, it may help to clarify the picture somewhat if we look the field over from the standpoint of a person or group supposedly entering through each of the institutional gateways successively.

The ways of the world are found within each and all of these areas, and that is why they must all be entered and explored if constructive social action is in view.



Let us suppose then that a representative or a group of representatives of the evangelical and sacramental Christian fellowship (organized into some Church institution or agency like the Council for Social Action) desires to do work in the social field, looking towards the bettering of conditions and the achieving of justice and the liberation of human beings from one or another kind of oppression or exploitation.

This representative individual or group comes, let us say, to the field of family relations. What first ought to be done? Ought not the representative of the gospel to commence right away by telling precisely what he or his group intend to do about the conditions in this field? Hardly. The first thing to do is to explore the field and keep on exploring it until the ground has been fully covered and the situation fairly well understood. Then and only then will the representative be in a position to do or recommend anything effective or constructive in that field.

But before the exploration has gone very far conditions will be uncovered which quite obviously it would be very difficult quickly to change or even to modify. So, in preparing for later action, the explorer makes note of this and prepares to accommodate himself to the conditions as they exist only just so far as seems necessary in order to get anything done immediately at all.

For example, while the representative undoubtedly abhors divorce and regards it as being intrinsically a denial of the gospel, yet he will realize that the spirit of which divorce is a symptom may have become so entrenched in the general social establishment for one reason or another, that it can not be eradicated at once. He will therefore simply mark this fact down as relevant to a future activity in the field, and meanwhile get ready for immediate work on the basis of realizable possibility. He will not thereby condone divorce nor pretend to regard it as a good thing. He will merely accept it as a condition in the situation as it is given, and hope to be able

ultimately by a longer process of radical alteration in the underlying *mores* of the social establishment, to eradicate divorce practically altogether except, perhaps, as a drastic therapeutic device to be used only in cases of extreme maladjustment or critical abnormality.

Meanwhile, also, he will be discovering a large number of positive things that may be done; such as helping to set up health clinics, to establish centers for sound sex instruction, to develop special classes for the training of home-builders, to organize home clubs of various sorts in which a premium is put upon the fullest and richest kind of family life.

And now the explorer will come upon fresh difficulties which originate in one of the other fields. He will find, perhaps, that the external conditions and social surroundings in which many families are forced to carry on their home life are wretched and miserable—the houses or tenements or shacks they have to exist in, the neighborhoods in which they have to rear their children, the filthy and litter-strewn patches of ground or the congested streets in which the youngsters have to play. Or he may find that there is poverty so abysmal that no good home life could ever possibly survive, since there is scarcely food enough to feed the mouths or clothing enough to cover the bodies of parents and children alike. Thus it will commence to dawn upon the social action representative that family relations depend in no small part upon economic relations. And then he will start across the field for another gate.

Perhaps this analogy or illustration has been carried far enough. All that needs further to be suggested is that in covering the economic field certain special difficulties will be encountered which are definitely traceable to political neglects or abuses. Then after a time the political neglects and abuses will disclose connections with an international situation of gravely evil kind; such as the prevailing system of unqualified national sovereignty, the practice of tariff exclusion interfer-

ing with world trade, the deeply entrenched military and naval policies, the imperialistic ambitions, the racial animosities, and the generally anarchical condition of affairs between each and every nation on the globe.

If then this social action representative, be he either individual or group, has not grown discouraged by the vastness of the problem nor disillusioned by discovering how difficult it must be to solve or even commence to solve it, there will have been born an awareness of the situation in its entirety. And alongside with this awareness will have been born also a great desire to undertake action upon the largest possible scale commensurate with available resources. Yet at the same time, furthermore, *it will have become plain that the problem of one single obscure family in a tenement or in a migratory worker's shack is actually the problem of civilization as a whole.* So, in attacking the individual family's problem the entire problem of civilization will also be attacked at one of its salient points. Nothing in the field of social action will thereafter seem too small, and nothing will seem too large, for the serious effort of evangelical and sacramental Christianity.

That opposition is certain to arise goes almost without saying. There are those who reap much profit from the situation as it now stands. Some there are who must lose money in any drastic clean-up of the industrial slums or in any effective program to provide fairly decent housing for migratory laborers in agriculture. Some will have to give up power and prestige as well as wealth in the process of lifting an economic system to a level at which evangelical Christians in the sacramental bond will dare to stop and compromise. Some will go down to defeat in a political change involving a restoration of justice in the nations. Some will be discountenanced and dethroned when international relations are sufficiently improved to create a civilized world order. Yet even so, the work must go on and Christianity must have a hand deeply in it.



*For so comes the gospel by social action upon the ways of the world!*

It comes in the flesh and blood of faithful Christians who are held in the sacramental bond. It comes representing God's kingdom. It is ready to do what needs to be done, even at the cost of certain tentative compromises, in order that this world may be a better place for human beings to live in.

But all the while, as the gospel fellowship strives on to help bring justice and extend the range of general welfare among men, something will be happening that is of even greater consequence and of even profounder meaning. The gospel, embodied in the flesh and blood of those who bear it out upon the ways of the world, represents infinitely more than its mere human embodiment. For all social action in the gospel's mode and in the spirit of Jesus becomes a token of God's love for men as Jesus showed it, and as it keeps showing itself incessantly in unexpected manifestations whenever compassion offers itself to those who are in any need.

Viewed in this light it may be seen how close to the very soul of Advent, Christian social action always brings us. And this must be so, for Christ is forever being born again. It is almost as if the embodiment of faith and devotion in redemptive deeds may be understood as standing for the recurrent and yet eternal Incarnation.

The coming of Christ the Redeemer in human form is carried onward by Christian social action in the evangelical and sacramental fellowship; and his return to earth in every time is witnessed and attested each day by those who for love of him maintain the bond and keep the faith by which their compassionate effort in behalf of afflicted mankind is transmuted into a miracle of spiritual grace. Thus, Christmas comes once more.



## YOU AND SOCIAL ACTION

Dr. Hugh Vernon White was visiting in the home of one of our ministers. During a family conversation, the Council for Social Action was discussed. Someone said, "What is the Council for Social Action?" Little Nan, the minister's eight-year old daughter, piped up with "It publishes little books that tell all about the world."

We have been publishing those "little books" now for five years. And SOCIAL ACTION is serving an ever-widening circle of people who are not content to be passive; people who want to *act* but who first want to *know*. In five years over 600,000 copies have been distributed, each a compact, concise, factual presentation dealing with such issues as Democracy and the Negro, Rural People and the Church, Labor and Democracy, Christianity Confronting War.

There is nothing quite like it in the field today. We are continually getting new subscribers who write in: "Why didn't I know of this before? It is just what I want." Such discoveries are more or less accidental.

How can you help to make SOCIAL ACTION known? Have you ever said to a friend: "I want to lend you a little magazine which I find most helpful." Have you thought of giving a year's subscription as a Christmas or New Year's gift to your friends who want a Christian interpretation of the facts?

We shall be most grateful for your help and eager for any suggestions you have for improving our magazine. For we have a goal—10,000 SOCIAL ACTION subscribers. We can achieve this only by making our magazine better than ever. In the last few months we have had such an enthusiastic response to each new issue that we believe we can attain our goal.

With each new subscription entered in the months of December and January we are offering a choice of one of the following pamphlets: two Public Affairs Pamphlets: *America and the Refugees*, by Louis Adamic; *Cooperatives in the U.S.*, by Maxwell Stewart. Or our own 'best seller', *How to Read a Newspaper*, by Paul Hutchinson.

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*"Christmas Comes Once More" and the Council for Social Action wishes you a Merry one and a New Year full of happiness.*

## Christmas Comes Once More



Where children pure and happy,  
Pray to the Holy Child;  
Where misery cries out to Thee,  
Son of the Mother mild;  
Where faith and hope stand waiting,  
And love flings wide the door,  
The long night wakes,  
The glory breaks,  
And Christmas comes once more.

—PHILLIPS BROOKS

CHRISTIAN social action does not originate in humanitarian sympathies, although it poignantly feels and shares them. It does not spring from a love of justice although it loves justice with an inflexible and determined allegiance. It does not derive from a desire to help build a better world, although it looks about to see and grasp every opportunity to help in the building of a better world. It does not even arise from a devotion to the ideal of the kingdom of God, although it cherishes that ideal and is utterly devoted to it. It springs and arises from a simple belief in the gospel story, and from the assurance that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It arises and springs from a devout acceptance of the story of Jesus in its wholeness and fullness, and from a willingness to let that story have its way with one's entire life.